

FRED SCHIMMEL: ARTIST AN INTRODUCTION TO HIS WORK

LEON SCHMIDT
Johannesburg

Fred Schimmel creates on a tightrope stretched across an abyss. Close inspection of his work reveals the coiled fibres of this rope on which he struggles to achieve a precarious balance. These coils can be identified as intertwining sets of opposites in perpetual tension. Poise, balance and opposition in his work were noted in the press as early as 1967 (Oliver Kerr in *The Sunday Express*, 16 July) and "many layered screens of contrast" were later to be mentioned (*S.A. Arts Calendar*, February 1978).

In most of Schimmel's works a horizontal, planar division of the two-dimensional format supplies a relatively stable backdrop for the dynamic interaction between the sets of opposites. This backdrop functions in terms of subject-matter, which is not of primary importance in Schimmel's work. He sketches in the landscape only to destroy such studies (*The Star*, 30 June 1967); he peels layers off the landscape to reveal its essence (Menan du Plessis in *The Cape Times*, 19 December 1972); he is interested in the "bones rather than the flesh" (Andrew Verster in *The Daily News*, 30 March 1978); his work is evocative, he suggests but does not state (Benita Munitz in *The Cape Times*, 19 December 1992).

Opposition does, however, even manifest itself on the level of subject-matter in Schimmel's work. Tension between opposing motifs was mentioned by Nico van Rensburg as early as 1968 (*Die Vaderland*, 10 September). More importantly, the horizontal division of the format denotes the relationship between earth and sky in the landscape; between the material and the spiritual world. A high horizon-line and the protrusion across this line of earthly elements – lines and shapes suggestive of leaves, reeds, boats, boulders, mountains ... – tend to celebrate the physical dimension of the here and now. But, the reference to space, to the

beyond, to the far away, to the unreachable, is never absent. The underplayed quietude above the horizon-line draws the viewer into the works, after a primary response to the energy relayed beneath the line.

This contrapuntal experience connotes the central issue in Schimmel's work when it is interpreted in terms of a thematic level of pictorial meaning. The artist strives towards an integration of elemental, cosmic divisions. This theme is supported by the landscape as subject-matter. In this respect Schimmel's work is not only related to the whole corpus of landscape painting in Western art history, but also to the creations of ancient Taoists and Zen Buddhists. Man's striving towards integration is archetypal and universal and thus Schimmel's 'landscapes' can suggest affinities with very different thematic traditions.

Opposites in tension manifest in Schimmel's work through subject-matter and theme, but mainly through a very practical involvement with the formal level of pictorial meaning. It is in this dimension of his work where the dynamism between sets of opposites is particularly evident. Subject-matter and theme become reference rather than substance, result rather than means, signal rather than sign. Their role in Schimmel's work should, however, not be marginalised, as they add to ambiguity and evocation. Ju-

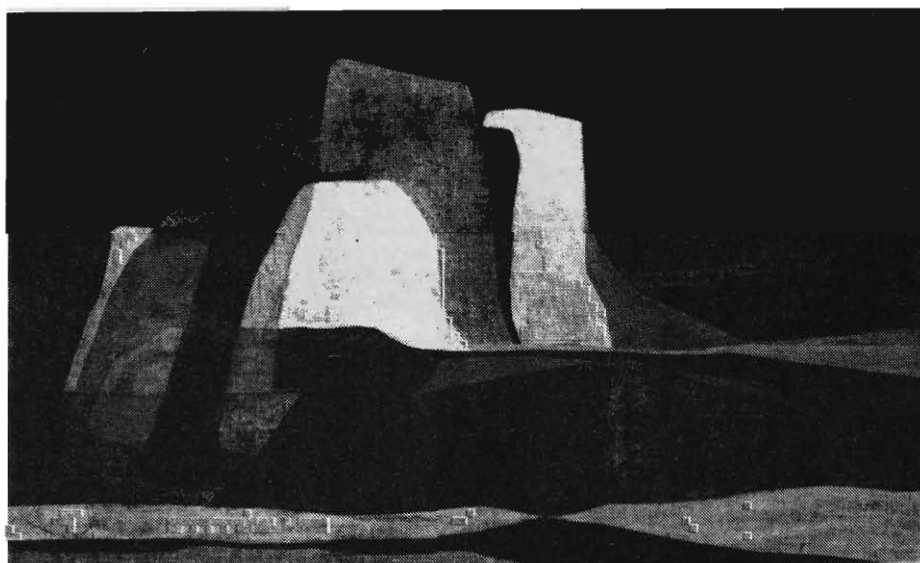


Figure 1: *Drakensberg* (1968) oil on paper 45 x 70cm.

dith Mason mentioned the dual nature of images which read as pure form but also as telephone wires or hoardings; the narrative element when a lost sculpture in a junk yard is suggested; and the austere graffiti of isolated words integrated into the works (*Lantern*, November 1977).

Carl Gustav Jung once drew mandalas in the sand. He drew them over and over again on a quiet beach. Paper is a beach for Fred Schimmel. On it he defines a horizon-line as a point of reference, from whence inner projection onto the format can evolve. The shifting relationships between plane, colour, line and texture are central to this creative process. All the other contrasting opposites in Schimmel's work are related to and defined by these relationships (as will be suggested in a later section of this text).

For Schimmel the experience of making the work is primary. He is, in the first instance, engaged with his material. This is probably why he has been called "an artist's artist" (*The Natal Mercury*, 28 June 1974 and Frank Horley, *In die wolke*, November 1979); and why Cecil Skotnes contended that a change in Schimmel's work goes hand in hand with a change in medium (*Artlook*, August 1969).

Schimmel 'runs' with his material – while struggling to control it. He plays with signs – while trying to anchor them as the marks of freedom within a disciplined structure. He projects a naive and emotional expressivity onto a sophisticated and cerebral framework, aggressive sound onto meditative silence, eroticism onto spirituality, the informal onto mathematical precision, vivid strength onto delicate tranquillity, boldness onto serenity, energy onto the monotonous, and intricacy

onto simplicity. In 1974, H.E. Winder wrote of "so little and so much" with regard to Schimmel's work (*The Rand Daily Mail*, 25 January). He builds and breaks down, closes form and opens it. This complex and continuous conversation between the artist and his material may possibly be due to his partial deafness, which has isolated him to some extent and directed him inwards.

The formal contrasts in Schimmel's work amplify and sustain the more readily understandable oppositions on the levels of subject-matter and theme. Seen jointly, they suggest that striving towards synthesis which is as old as life itself. Schimmel is forever moving between inner experience and outer boundaries, between internally motivated experimentation and externally shared observation. He creates his mandalas within the circle of opposites, between the extremes of Yin and Yang.

As early as 1965, Richard Cheales wrote of constant striving with regard to Schimmel's work (*Die Vaderland*, 10 March). Mary Packer thought that he had "been content to make haste slowly" (*The Star*, 7 July 1967). Another critic mentioned that he gained discriminating followers in a quiet, modest way (*The Pretoria News*, 6 May 1968). Oliver Kerr drew attention to "metamorphosis" in his work (*The Sunday Express*, 24 September 1972).

These opinions are all related to the fact that the result of opposition in Schimmel's work cannot be appreciated in terms of one or a few works. Schimmel's strength as an artist does not reside in the masterpiece or in a number of major works, but rather in continuous process, in adventurous renewal as against the set conventions by which he limits

himself. His is an oeuvre which cannot – and has not – been justly appreciated in terms of the many intermittent one-man exhibitions of his work; through the many group shows in which he participated; or through the many concurrent reviews of these events. After more than four decades of uninterrupted work, his oeuvre should be appreciated as a whole – both in terms of central issues mentioned and in terms of the road along which his work has evolved.

Schimmel was born in Amsterdam during 1928. When he was eighteen years old, he studied



Figure 2: *Field* (1966) crayon on paper 40 x 50cm.

architecture in Holland for a brief period. He soon found that a repetitive element in the course did not suit his temperament and so he changed to attend art school – the then *Kunstnijverheidschool* in Amsterdam – for a short while in 1947. According to the artist, he “went wild” in this context and “had a great sense of fun”. Seen in retrospect, however, it is probable that both these experiences were internalised by Schimmel, as free experimentation and precise discipline are so integral to his creative process. Although he was frustrated while studying architecture, Eldred Green would later write about his mathematical insight with regard to the relationship of parts (*The Argus*, 13 December 1972); while Sikke Doeleand Marius Touwen would characterise each of his works as “een hecht bouwerkje” (*Leeuwarder Courant*, 13 April 1979).

Schimmel’s family immigrated to South Africa in 1948. At the time he was twenty years old and to sustain himself he worked as an assistant to a commercial artist in Johannesburg for a few years. He soon realised that commercial and fine art do not share the same goals. However, this period was probably of crucial importance to his work. It taught him the technical procedures of precision printing, while motivating him to reach out towards the expressive freedom which only the fine artist can strive for. Fortunately for him, the firm for which he worked had a silkscreen department and as he had always had an interest in printing methods he soon switched over to working in this field and to learning all of its fundamentals. (See Esmé Berman, *Art and artists of South Africa*, 1983). Frank Horley would later write that few “people know better than he does the essential difference between commercial printing and printing as an art form” (*In die wolke*, November 1979).

While working for the commercial artist Schimmel also became involved with the Polly Street Art Centre. He worked there as a volunteer lecturer from 1949 to 1957. This “small, undistinguished institution became the seminal source of a minor cultural revolution – the launching-pad for the first large-scale venture of urban [black] South Africans into the plastic arts” (Berman 1974: 231). Many important black South African artists found a first venue, material and help at the centre. Names such as Sidney Kumalo, Ben Arnold, Louis Maqhubela, Ephraim Ngatane and Ezekiel Segole come to mind. Schimmel made an important contribution to the development of their work and that at a time long before it became fashionable and topical for



Figure 3: *Mountain farm* (1977) Screenprint 54 x 42 cm.

white South Africans to be involved with the work of black artists in this country.

During the fifties, Schimmel’s life also meandered along other routes. He sketched the South African landscape *in situ*; he enriched his field of reference by spending time in Australia; and he met many other South African artists. One of these was Walter Battiss, who became extremely interested in what Schimmel could offer in terms of knowledge and expertise as far as silkscreen printing as a fine art medium was concerned. This liaison led to Schimmel’s launching of his own graphic studio with some experimental prints for Battiss. (See Berman 1983). Battiss – later world-reknowned for his knowledge of rock art and nationally revered as a free, creative spirit – was somebody whom Schimmel could easily feel an affinity for. His open attitude, his sense of fun and pleasure in creating works of art, and possibly more importantly, his involvement with the universality of artistic creation, attracted Schimmel.

Art can transcend cultural boundaries. Dutch-born Schimmel realised this in South Africa through his association with the Polly Street Art Centre, with Battiss and also when he became involved with Chinese watercolours through his association with Professor Bok Chen in Johannesburg during the early sixties. He spent a lot of time with Bok Chen at the old Gallery 101 and in an informal way he also learnt about Eastern calligraphy. This experience made him realise that a Zen Buddhist approach to art and that of the New York School share common affinities; that oneness

with natural energy can be relayed by a strong calligraphic, gestural element in art. Within the conventional framework of calligraphy, Schimmel did, however, also learn that emotive energy expressed through the artist's handwriting requires stringent control if it is to eschew facile patternmaking.

Still in the sixties, Schimmel was commissioned for a Zimbabwean project to sandblast a series of glass panels. This led him to the self-imposed task of learning the craft of glass-engraving. A big commission followed when he was asked to engrave the glass windows for the large Roman Catholic Cathedral in Kroonstad. This reinforced his technical skills, but especially his creativity with the use of line on coloured plane. Judith Mason would later write that "Fred Schimmel is the master of the uncompromising, committed line: no evasions, no affectations" (*Lantern*, November 1977), while H.E. Winder would remark on his "splendid draughtmanship" (*The Rand Daily Mail*, 16 June 1980). Schimmel would also admit to a great reverence for the line employed by Paul Klee (interview with the artist, March 1993).

During the formative decades of the fifties and sixties, Schimmel produced a steady stream of work, apart from the commissions

mentioned. A body of figural illustrations; graphics; works in pastel and crayon on paper; and oils on paper date from this period. Most of the works – except the figural illustrations – share the suggested landscape with horizon-line as subject-matter. Only some of these were included in his first one-man exhibition at the Egon Guenther Gallery in Johannesburg during 1964 and in subsequent exhibitions during the sixties.

The human figure persisted in Schimmel's works for some time and should be seen as related to a separate – sometimes humoristic – category within his oeuvre. Examples are to be found in the hundreds of marginal illustrations (which began as doodles) to Jack Kerouac's *Mexico City Blues* (first published in 1959 as a volume of 242 Beat Verse Choruses). Schimmel produced these unpublished illustrations in the early sixties, but as late as 1977 he was still severely criticised for his "illustrative, stereotyped" figures (*Leeuwarder Courant*, 4 February) – wrongly so, because they represent a 'private pocket' within his oeuvre, a 'bow', as it were, to the sardonic nature of beat poetry. Nevertheless, the artist did himself realise that the human figure became "too important", i.e. "too isolated from the whole of the format" (interview



Figure 4: Commission for the Allied Building in Johannesburg (1979) oil on wood 150 x 500 cm.

with the artist, March 1993) and in time he would abandon it altogether. Schimmel's creativity needed the stable backdrop of the suggested landscape, onto which sets of opposites can be projected through the shifting relationships between plane, colour, line and texture.

Early works (dating from the fifties and sixties) in which

the landscape form a point of reference, already bring these relationships into prominent relief in Schimmel's oeuvre. Two alternatives present themselves: In some of the works, plane is paramount. A "minimum palette" (H.E. Winder in *The Rand Daily Mail* 21 September 1972) of earthy hues augment the presence of the planes. Line is merely operational for the precise, controlled definition of the planes, and texture is virtually absent. The results of this configuration are simple and



Figure 5: *Tideline* (1982-83) Oil on paper 70 x 100 cm.

majestic. They were praised as the "shapes of silence" (*Artlook*, July 1967), as capturing the essence of mountain range and boulder (Neville Dubow in *The Cape Argus*, 30 November 1968); for their monumental quality and for their subtlety in the use of the oval shape (*The Natal Witness*, 17 November 1970), rather than the more explicit rectangle, square or circle.

In some other work from the fifties and sixties, another configuration between formal elements is noticeable. This alternative relies on a coalition between line and texture, or rather line as texture. Colour is less bound to plane, which recedes to a mere suggestion by the format of the paper. This combination relays greater freedom, spontaneity and lyrical expressiveness, while losing the majestic control and monumentality of the aforementioned alternative. Seen from the vantage point of the nineties, the two possibilities now seem to have been portentous, as they would collide and collude in a variety of ways throughout the rest of Schimmel's work.



Figure 6: *Autumn field* (1984) Crayon and oil on paper 50 x 70 cm.

In 1970, Schimmel founded the Graphic Club of South Africa. Larry Scully would later write an article entitled "Graphics for All" (*The Sunday Express*, 26 January 1975) about it. He compared it to the medieval workshop in which artists collaborated towards a shared goal. The aims of Schimmel's Graphic Club were to promote silkscreen printing as a fine art medium; to stimulate artistic creativity; and to make good works of art readily available and affordable to the public. These aims were to be achieved during the decade of the seventies.

Schimmel devoted a great amount of time and energy to the Graphic Club. He stimulated and helped many South African artists,



Figure 7: *Harvest* (1984) Crayon and oil on paper 50 x 70 cm.

such as Judith Mason-Attwood, Dirk Meerkotter and Bettie Cilliers-Barnard. The graphic works of these and many other artists were exhibited in 1977 at the Rand Afrikaans University and at the Pretoria Art Museum. The works were exhibited as having been printed in the Fred Schimmel Studio and they were embossed with the FS monogram. In a sense these exhibitions were retrospective of Schimmel's involvement with the Graphic Club, as he would soon follow his own road again.

Through his involvement with the Graphic Club, Schimmel established himself as the craftsman among craftsmen in the South African artistic milieu. Although his sound craftsmanship had been mentioned even in sixties' reviews, Judith Mason now wrote of

him as the "leading exponent of the serigraph in the country" (*Lantern*, November 1977). Esmé Berman would later (1983) bring attention to his daring experiments with silkscreen printing: "with the adoption of a number of unorthodox procedures – such as painting directly onto the screen with a gelatine solution – he was able to capture the gestural vitality of *alla prima* painting in the print."

During the seventies, Schimmel's oil paintings took second place to involvement with the Graphic Club and to his own concentration on graphic work. Through procedures such as those mentioned by Berman, his painting and graphic output did, however, fuse in a certain sense during this decade.

The 'painterly' graphics produced by Schimmel at the time, are characterised by certain common features: The – mostly muted – coloured planes of the earlier monumental works are retained within the framework of the suggested landscape. Careful control emanate from the deployment of these planes. What used to be a second alternative in the earlier works – the use of line as texture – is now, however, often superimposed

onto and between the coloured planes in one and the same work. Freedom and spontaneity reside in the spiky, linear texture 'gestured' across the planes; while the blurring of colour boundaries, the asymmetrical positioning of shapes and the calligraphic spaces between planes support this other side of Schimmel's coin. The two faces of Janus search for each other in these works. Thereby a tension is created which always set Schimmel's graphics apart from the results of commercial printing.

In 1979, Schimmel created a commissioned mural for the Allied Building Society in Johannesburg. This work consists of five painted wood panels in large format. It can be seen as the zenith of controlled monumentality in the artist's oeuvre. The careful deli-



Figure 8: *Untitled* (late 1980's) watercolour and handmade paper 50 x 65 cm.

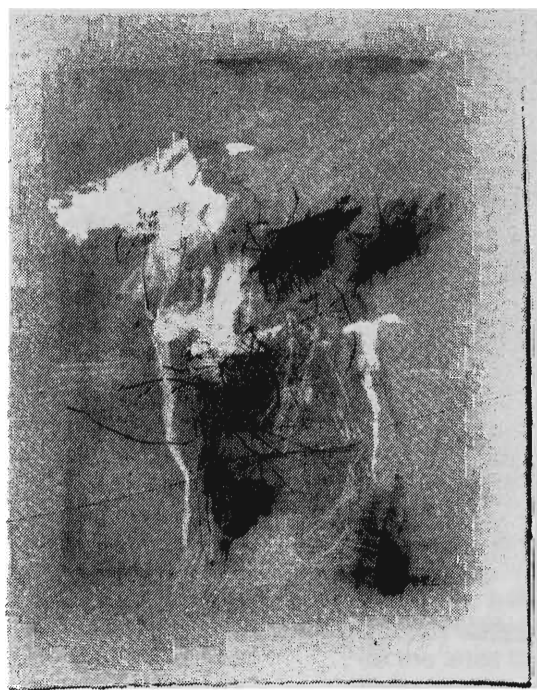


Figure 9: *Untitled* (late 1980's) watercolour and handmade paper 50 x 65 cm.

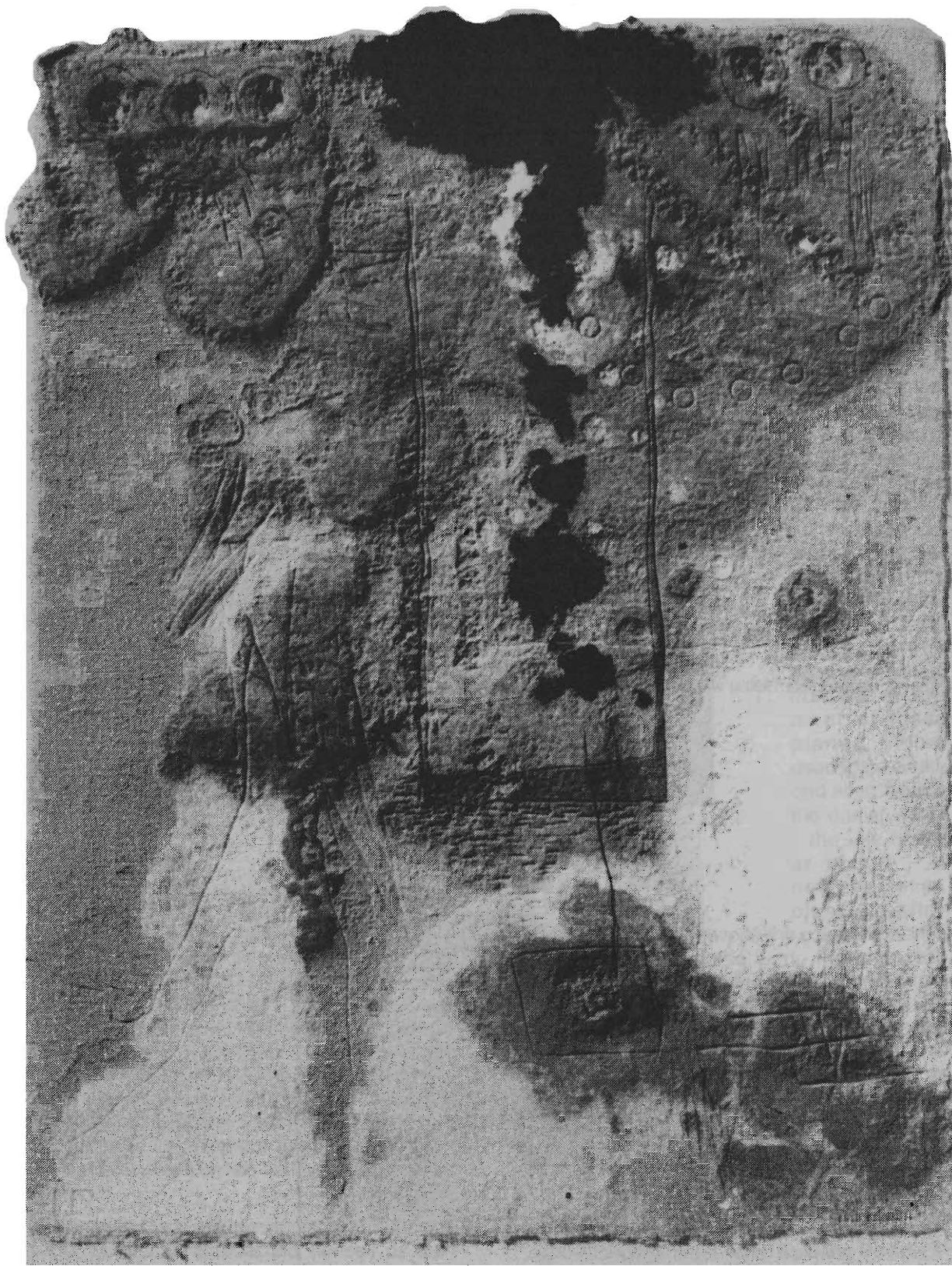


Figure 10: *Untitled* (late 1980's) watercolour and handmade paper 50 x 65 cm.

neation of planes links it to the use of stencils in silkscreen printing. On a large scale and for public commission, the artist concentrated on precision. The result show Schimmel at his best with careful composition in terms of coloured plane on the backdrop of the relatively neutral, suggested landscape as subject-matter. Thus, the mural refers back to earlier work, while being a summary of an important facet of that work. Schimmel does, however, recognise saturation point (see *Die Hoofstad*, 23 January 1978) and he was to abandon the extreme control which is manifest in the mural. He was to abandon printmaking as well and to surprise with intensified creativity during the eighties and early nineties.

Oil on paper came into its own with an exhibition entitled *Tideline* (1982-1983). The black and white works on the exhibition were singularly unpopular in South Africa, but were greeted with enthusiasm in Holland. Critics there saw them as strivings towards the evocation of the sublime and the transcendent in nature (*Leeuwarder Courant*, 21 October 1983). Whatever the reaction was, this exhibition marked a watershed in Schimmel's oeuvre: Earlier oppositions went through a process of realignment. Plane became suffused with subtle texture, while line and (non-) colour integrated to run riot in expansive gestural movements across the surface. Schimmel had come home to the projection of an inner rhythm and vitality, whilst still enticing with suggestions of abstract distillation from observed reality. Sea, sand, beach and sky were swept up into movement as calligraphy, 'stencil-like strips' from printmaking and painterly qualities fused. By 1984, colour had slowly crept back into these works. Ochre and sepia in particular were washed across the surfaces. In conjunction with black, dark brown, dark blue and blue-grey, these tonal effects are reminiscent of seventeenth-century Dutch landscape painting. Subject-matter has been relegated to a position of lesser importance, while formal elements are more autonomous. Nevertheless, the viewer experiences modern-day echoes of Van Goyen and Van Ruisdael.

Two subgroups can be discerned within this body of work. In some, one is confronted with dramatic tonal contrasts and energetic gestural signs across the surface. In others, a more lyrical and underplayed atmospheric character is evident. In conjunction, the works elicited positive response in South Africa by the middle of 1984. Elza Miles saw the tension of a dual process of destruction and exposure in them, as well as the deciphering of the handwriting left on a beach by driftwood and flotsam (*Die Beeld*, 12 June).

Just after the mid-eighties, Schimmel surprised again when his well-known reference to the landscape almost disappeared in a whole and very prolific new corpus of work. For this series, oil on paper gave way to frenetic experimentation as the artist turned to papermaking – not as a means to an end, but as a fine art medium in its own right. In many of these works, the reference to observable nature ceded place to the importance of the geometrical format as an anchoring device. Inventive acts with formal elements ensued. Especially in these works, Schimmel created as *homo ludens*, man in play. Textured paper with uncut edges brought a variety of colours with it, while others were printed, dripped or washed onto the surface. Planes and lines – more geometrical or more organic – were indented onto the soft material of the paper. Some of these works are dark and dramatic, through the use of black, dark brown and red. In others, soft tonal hues are lyrically employed. In others still, an almost minimal monochromatic use of tone emphasise the paper itself.

Within this body of work one can discern references to Schimmel's early paintings; to his graphics; to his black and white works; and to his ochre and sepia paintings. With these works he went off on a new tangent, but continuity was also preserved in his oeuvre. The works were not a marginalised experiment with a new medium. References to art history also anchored them within Schimmel's previous experience: Far Eastern script; the monolithic forms of Middle Eastern architecture; the nominal images – e.g., the circle with interjecting vertical line – of Zen Buddhist iconography; the *tache* (blot, stain, spot, drip) of American gestural abstraction; and echoes of many twentieth-century informal paintings are subtly woven into the crafted fabric of these works. Schimmel became engaged – engrossed – with his new medium and in the process of creation, such internalised references were projected intuitively into and onto the paper.

It is an extraordinary feat that in all of these many works, Schimmel never once submitted to facile repetition and patternmaking. Energy, inventiveness and sometimes a sense of fun, exude from the works. Once again, Schimmel abandoned this new direction at the right moment, although the results sold extremely well. Seen now as a whole, this body of work seems complete and it was time for the artist to move on, because he "has to keep alive at his work ... if you start working for a public you don't develop and it gets you nowhere" (interview with the artist, March 1993).



Figure 11: *Summer's day* (1991) acrylic on paper 84 x 65 cm.

Before Schimmel's next phase, an important article was published with regard to the paperworks (Bettie Lambrecht in *Die Beeld*, 8 September 1987). The tension between opposites in Schimmel's work once again came to the fore through some succinct remarks by the author: Voyages between man's inner and outer world, between spirit and cosmos were suggested. The textured crust of the earth was likened to the craters of the moon. The spontaneity of adult doodles and child art was brought together. Relief and indentation were contrasted and related to the sandpaintings of André Masson. Erosion through natural processes, as against human incision with a sharp tool, was mentioned, as well as Schimmel's multivalent role as painter, relief artist and sculptor in the creation of the paperworks. Lambrecht also experienced these often non-objective works as direct projections of the artist's and one's own unconscious. This is related to Judith Mason's earlier injunction that the viewer should move into Schimmel's work and that a meditative silence is necessary for full appreciation (*Lantern*, November 1977).

After the paperworks (by about 1988), Schimmel moved on to a new phase of painting on commercially produced paper. At the beginning of this phase, crayon and oils respectively expressed graphic line and painterly qualities. The last-mentioned slowly won the day as Schimmel started to experiment with acrylic paint. He would, however, soon find it to be a medium especially prone to facile effects. But, for a short period, the use of acrylics resulted in another new body of works in Schimmel's oeuvre.

The relevant works are so far removed from Schimmel's early works, that one has to keep reminding oneself of the slow and continuous process of evolution between the fifties and recent years. They 'trace', as it were, the soaring of a bird in flight, the freedom of untrammelled creativity after many years of very hard work.

The paintings communicate a new excitement and involvement with the gestural brushstroke. After the experience of the paperworks, it seems as if the artist needed to immerse himself in the painterly qualities of his new, direct medium

and as if references to observable nature were less important than before, in the face of a newfound confidence in the value of his own inner projection onto paper.

These paintings can roughly be dated between 1988 and 1991. On the whole they are characterised by black, white or brightly coloured gestural line signatures across light backgrounds consisting of textured planes. In these works, energetic brushstrokes convey a highly charged – almost frenetic – energy. The spiky lines incorporated in Schimmel's graphics gain painterly substance. Black and red on orange, white and red on red, black and red on blue, black and white on blue-grey, and many other permutations can be seen in – once again – a very prolific corpus of work.

In the most recent paintings (those dating from 1992-1993), a new direction can once again be noticed in Schimmel's work. It is, however, not arbitrary. Continuity is still preserved and innovation is crafted onto experience. The horizontal division of the format is reintroduced and the reference to the landscape reasserts itself. At the same time, the

horizontal division can now be read as a reference to the table-top. The viewer senses a new ambiguity – now between the landscape and the still-life as subject-matter. This is due to very dark backgrounds, to a diminishing of spatial suggestions and to the partial closure of shapes in the foreground.

For these new works, Schimmel found a new adversary to struggle with in the form of car duco. Oil paints do not last, while the motor industry uses a commercially viable product which does. Car duco, however, dries quickly and this makes it a difficult paint

tion. At the same time they are post-modernist in nature: Firstly, because they are related to Neo-Romanticism in their Nordic evocation of atmosphere and dramatic mood (see Benita Munitz in *The Cape Times*, 9 December 1992). Secondly, because they pay homage to seventeenth-century Dutch landscapes and to the marvellous, elaborate still-lives produced in that era.

At the age of sixty-five, Fred Schimmel is growing towards a synthesis of his life as an artist: The compositional precision of architectural design; the painterly freedom experi-



Figure 12: *Rainswept landscape* (1993) automobile paint on paper 84 x 65 cm.

to work with and a medium which does not lend itself to slick and facile effects. It also has a rich, viscous, tactile character if used correctly for painterly purposes.

Most of the resultant paintings share a dark, mysterious backdrop onto which a rich, baroque palimpsest of coloured brushstrokes suggest shapes and the relationships between them. The intensity of the duco colours, the energy of textured, painterly brushstrokes, the variety of shapes, and the movement of these in combination are offset against the stable line of the horizon or table-top and the dark mystery beyond the immediacy of Schimmel's artistic handwriting.

These works stand four-square within the best tradition of modernist gestural projec-

enced at art school; the technical prowess of printmaking; the observational experience of the landscape; the playful element shared with Battiss; the contact with the universality of art at Polly Street Art Centre; the calligraphic interest; the learning of techniques of engraving and papermaking; the long, continuous process of experimentation with various media; the constant contact with modernist art; and the reintegration of his Nordic and Dutch roots all play a part in the recent works. All of these experiences are fusing into mature, late twentieth-century paintings, in some of which a lightening of the background already suggest a possible new direction.

Schimmel has woven many strands into his work. His main affinity, does, however, lie with twentieth-century informal art – with the Abstract Expressionism of Robert Motherwell and Antoni Tapies; and especially with the work of the CoBrA Group (Asger Jorn and Karel Appel). He reveres Cy Twombly for his intuitive processes and the formal challenges inherent in this artist's work. Twombly, Motherwell and Jorn "give an artist freedom, they show that one can do anything – but of course one can't just do anything and that is one's own dilemma" (interview with the artist, March 1993). This love of freedom and the 'impossible' probably also explains Schimmel's fascination with science fiction.

Schimmel also has strong affinity with twentieth-century artists who shun overt subject-matter and theme, while still adhering to it as a point of reference. His work is related to those of other artists in which a strong primary concern with the material and with formal elements (plane, colour, line and texture) is evident. The making of the work in technical terms is foremost in the creative process of "this matter-of-fact Dutchman who is not much given to intellectualising", as Schimmel describes himself. Schimmel has learnt from his experience of Zen Buddhism that the emptying of the mind can direct creativity through the artist's hands. As a result of this, emotive energy is directly conveyed through the brush onto the format in most of his best works; he has even playfully compiled a series of one hundred brushstrokes on paper for possible publication. Philosophical and rational concerns are secondary, although compositional control has led to him being described as being a "cerebral" artist (*The Financial Mail*, 23 August 1991); and the observable world becomes no more than a neutral vantage point – leaving space for the continuous dialogue between opposites.

In South Africa, Schimmel's work is of importance for a number of reasons:

- He has brought a European sense of craftsmanship to the art world in this country.

- He has shown that printmaking can be a fine art medium and not only a commercial tool.
- He has propelled many well-known South African artists towards creativity in this field by providing a venue and his expertise.
- He has helped greatly towards the popularisation of art – specifically graphic art – in this country.
- He has brought art into many homes and offices as serigraphs are available and affordable.
- He has contributed to the creativity of black artists in South Africa.
- Schimmel's own work represents the best of twentieth-century informal art within the South African context.
- He has enriched the art world in this country, by broadening its frame of reference to include the work of Motherwell, Jorn and many other related artists.
- Through his work, Eastern calligraphy, Zen Buddhist art, Neo-Romanticism and the Dutch Baroque tradition have also found their way into the vocabulary of South African art.

The whole body of Schimmel's work holds a lesson for the art world in any developing country, such as South Africa, in which quick results and easy profits can become the undoing of many an artist. His work reflects an integrated, continuous process of creativity. Changes in his work follow his own organic growth as an artist. Nothing in his work is arbitrary, facile or fashionable for the sake of fashion. Schimmel has followed his own star over a period of more than forty years. This has resulted in an oeuvre which created its own parameters and which stayed true to them. This is what artistic integrity means and it is Schimmel's greatest gift to South African art.